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Naval Interdiction  
Considerations in the Use of Limited Naval Force  
In Operations Short of War

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature

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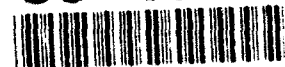
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Abstract of  
NAVAL INTERDICTION  
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IN OPERATIONS SHORT OF WAR

The use of naval interdiction of commerce in peacetime poses many considerations for the operational commander. Naval interdiction is used as a form of limited naval force in support of diplomacy and as a means of enforcing economic sanctions against a target nation. In the post World War II era naval interdiction has evolved in accepted use from an action which could only be legitimate when taken by belligerent nations engaged in a declared war to an action taken in peacetime under the authority of the United Nations, in response to a threat to international peace and security. Four naval interdiction operations undertaken since WWII are examined in order to understand the evolution of the concepts of blockade and naval interdiction in international law. These operations also provide the models for a study of the factors and conditions which contribute to the success of a naval interdiction operation. The operational commander must consider these factors and conditions when making the decision to implement naval interdiction as part of a strategy to achieve national policy objectives. Most importantly, to be legitimate, the interdiction operation must have the support of the international community and the authorization of an organization of collective security like the United Nations.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Naval diplomacy is a term which applies to a wide range of peacetime naval activities whose purpose is to influence the behavior of another nation. Sir James Cable defines "gunboat diplomacy" as "the use or threat of limited naval force by a government, short of an act of war, in order to secure an advantage or to avert loss".<sup>1</sup> Naval interdiction is just one level of limited naval force in a spectrum that runs from port visits by warships to freedom of navigation exercises to limited strikes on targets ashore. All of these actions are elements of coercive diplomacy which uses naval force to send signals of interest, support and concern or to force change in the behavior of another state.

This paper will examine the use of naval interdiction in operations short of war. For the operational commander, responsible for devising a theater military strategy which will attain United States national policy objectives, the question is the applicability of naval interdiction in achieving those objectives. What conditions should be present for naval interdiction to be successful? What conditions mitigate against its success? Can naval interdiction work by itself or must it always be part of a strategy which also uses other elements of national power? Finally, what is the importance of international approval and support? Can naval interdiction in the current international environment be applied unilaterally by

the United States or only as part of a multilateral action sanctioned by international organizations such as the United Nations or regional organizations such as the Western European Union and the Organization of American States?

This paper will contend that of all the factors to be considered by the operational commander before implementation of a naval interdiction strategy the requirement to have international support and a legal basis for the action is at least as important as the physical, geographic and economic conditions which determine the success or failure of the operation.

The paper will look at the use of naval interdiction in four operations that have occurred since the end of World War II:

- The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis Quarantine
- The 1965-1975 Beira Patrol
- The 1990-91 Middle East Maritime Interception Force Operation
- The 1992-93 Adriatic Maritime Interdiction Operation

These operations illustrate an evolution of the use of naval interdiction as a form of limited force designed to enforce compliance with international strictures. The United States action in 1962 was unilateral with an after the fact 'blessing' by the OAS to give it international legal status. The actions taken in 1990 to counter the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and in 1992 to counter Serbian aggression in the former Yugoslavia were strongly multilateral actions that carried the full legal weight

of United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

By examining these case studies and looking at not only those conditions which were important to their success or failure but also the increasing importance of international support we can derive 'lessons learned' for the operational commander.

#### Definition of Terms: Blockade and Naval Interdiction

The difference between a naval blockade and naval interdiction may at first seem to be just a question of semantics. As President Bush said regarding the imposition of the interdiction operations against Iraq in August, 1990: 'There is no point getting into all the semantics. The main thing is that we stop the oil coming out of there'.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, a difference in international law and it is the reason nations using limited naval force in operations short of war are at pains to describe actions which would be considered a 'blockade' in wartime as 'interdiction', 'quarantine', 'interception' or 'economic sanctions'.

A blockade is a 'belligerent operation to prevent vessels ...of all nations, enemy as well as neutral, from entering or exiting specified ports...or coastal areas under the control of an enemy nation'.<sup>3</sup> It is defined as an act of war which is a belligerent right. Its purpose may be to deny the flow of material resources to the enemy which would allow him to continue the war or it may be to prevent access to the sea of the enemy's

warships. By denying commerce to the enemy blockade is a means to assist in terminating hostilities because it denies the enemy the resources that are necessary to continue fighting.<sup>4</sup>

The phrase naval interdiction as it will be used in this paper describes the use of naval force to prevent the export and/or import by sea of specified contraband items. This may require the questioning, stopping, boarding and search of commercial vessels suspected of carrying contraband. Vessels carrying contraband may be diverted, turned back or seized. This operation may be limited to a single action or may be ongoing but it is considered by the international community to be a 'coercive act of diplomacy' which falls short of constituting war.<sup>5</sup>



## CHAPTER II

### INTERNATIONAL LAW: BLOCKADE AND NAVAL INTERDICTION

Restriction of commerce by means of naval interdiction has evolved from use only in wartime by belligerent parties to a unilateral or multilateral action taken in a state of intermediacy between peace and war... characterized by hostility between the opposing parties... but accompanied by an absence of intention or decision to go to war". 6

#### The Pacific Blockade

The use of blockade without the intention to go to war was first used in 1827 when Great Britain, France and Russia jointly blockaded a portion of the Greek coast then under Turkish occupation. By preventing the resupply of the Turkish forces it was hoped to force Turkey to concede independence to the Greeks.<sup>7</sup> This action became known as a 'pacific blockade' since it was taken without the blockading countries declaring a state of war. The legality of the pacific blockade was never accepted in international law or the community of nations. The main area of contention was the rights and responsibilities of non-involved (third party) nations. Despite this lack of acceptance pacific blockade was used a number of times in the 19th and early 20th century, prior to World War I, to force payment of debts by nations, to enforce the execution of treaties or to facilitate negotiations to maintain peace. 8 Pacific blockade proved to be

an effective use of limited naval force in coercive diplomacy. It provided force to back up diplomacy without necessarily causing escalation to open hostilities. A nation with strong naval forces or several nations acting in concert used the pacific blockade in an era before the creation of international organizations designed to promote collective security and the peaceful resolution of disputes. While never being fully accepted as a legal action pacific blockade does provide the historical model for the collective actions taken in the post World War II era under the auspices of the United Nations.

#### The Wartime Blockade

The traditional concept of blockades in wartime has evolved in custom and was codified in the 1856 Declaration of Paris and the 1909 Declaration of London. Under these declarations a blockade is a legitimate act of a belligerent in war and must conform to the following rules:

- It must be established by declaration of the blockading state as to when the operation is to begin and the area to be affected.
- It must be applied impartially to all vessels whether belligerent or neutral.
- It must not bar access to or departure from neutral ports or coasts.
- It must be effective to be legitimate. That is, it must be maintained with sufficient forces to actually enforce the blockade. 9

In both world War I and II significant departures from these traditional rules were made due to the changing nature of modern warfare. The use of the long distance blockade, establishment of war zones, the use of mines, submarines and aircraft and the almost total control neutral commerce were all evolutionary changes to the concept of the blockade.

The post World War II era has seen the continued evolution of the concept of naval interdiction of commerce in peacetime. It has become legitimized by international and regional organizations as tool to maintain peace, collective security and to enforce compliance with international norms of state behavior.

#### 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis Quarantine

The first test of this use of limited naval force to enforce a blockade like action in a crisis short of war was in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. The United States announced a "quarantine" of strategic arms bound for Cuba using the U.S. Navy to stop, board and search vessels suspected of carrying the specified contraband items. In this crisis the United States justified its actions as authorized by the United Nations Charter and a regional defence treaty, the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Pact). Quarantine was stated not to be a form of blockade (or even pacific blockade) but an authorized form of regional security that could be employed in peacetime. The official U.S. position was that the action was legal as a collective action by the American states under Articles 6 and 8 of the Rio Pact in response to a situation

endangering the peace of America. It was also said to be a legitimate exercise of the right of collective self defense under Article 51 of the U.N. Charter. 10 It has been argued that the U.S. action was in fact a unilateral action because the Organization of American States (OAS) did not issue their statement until the day after President Kennedy announced the imposition of the quarantine. The essential point for the purposes of this paper is that the United States, despite the unquestioned ability to act unilaterally, felt it critical to have collective support of the other nations in the OAS and to legitimize the action under the authorization of the OAS and the U.N. Charter. Robert Kennedy, then U.S. Attorney General summed up this requirement in the following statement:

"It was the vote of the Organization of American States that gave the legal basis for the quarantine...it...changed our position from that of an outlaw acting in violation of international law into a country acting in accordance with twenty allies protecting their position". 11

#### The Beira Patrol

The use of the British Royal Navy to enforce economic sanctions against Rhodesia was the next evolutionary step in the use of naval interdiction in peacetime. In November, 1965 the British colony of Southern Rhodesia announced its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) under the white minority ruled government led by Ian Smith. The United Nations Security Council imposed at first voluntary sanctions in trade against Rhodesia. Then in an unprecedented move the UN made use of the collective

enforcement measures of Article 41 of the UN charter. Royal Navy ships established the 'Beira Patrol' to prevent the importation of oil to Rhodesia through the port of Beira in Mozambique. The Security Council called upon the British government to take all "appropriate measures" which would prove effective in eliminating the authority of the current Rhodesian government. Four months after the start of the naval interdiction effort the UN Security Council authorized Britain to use force if necessary to stop any merchant oil tankers inclined to flaunt the trade embargo. 12

The resolution of the UN Security Council to impose trade and economic sanctions and to authorize a member nation, Great Britain, to enforce those sanctions by means of naval interdiction was precedent setting. The UN declared the situation in Rhodesia a threat to peace and authorized the use of limited naval force, in conjunction with other diplomatic and economic measures, in an effort to coerce a nation to abide by the norms of international behavior.

#### Middle East Maritime Interception Force Operation

Twenty five years later the UN Security Council, faced with another threat to international peace and security passed Resolution 661 which imposed an economic and trade embargo on Iraq. This action was taken in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August, 1990. In the resolution the UN affirmed the inherent right of individual or collective self defence in accordance with Article 51 of the charter and took actions which

derived their authority from Articles 41 and 42. These articles allow the imposition of economic sanctions and further measures of enforcement which "may include...blockade" to "restore international peace and security". 13 The resolution imposed an embargo of "all commodities or products originating in Iraq or Kuwait" and on the sale or supply to Iraq of "any commodities or products, including weapons or other military equipment".14 The only articles exempt were medical supplies and some humanitarian foodstuffs. By the end of August the United States and other coalition members were authorized under UNSCR 665 "such measures to the specific circumstances as may be necessary... to halt all inward and outward maritime shipping in order to inspect and verify their cargos and destination."15 By this resolution the use of the minimum force necessary to ensure compliance was authorized.

#### Adriatic Maritime Interdiction Operations

The enforcement of United Nations economic and trade sanctions directed toward the states of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) is the most recent example of naval interdiction of commerce authorized under the authority of the United Nations. Serbia's support for the violent civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is recognized as a threat to international peace and security. As such, the United Nations action is authorized under Articles 41 and 42 of the UN Charter. UNSCR 713 enacted an arms embargo and UNSCR 757 imposed economic sanctions including prohibition of all trade except foodstuffs and medical

supplies. UNSCR 787 invited enforcement of the sanctions by member nations.

NATO and the Western Economic Union (WEU) have undertaken enforcement of these resolutions by imposition of maritime interdiction operations in the Adriatic Sea. NATO's Standing Naval Force Mediterranean (STANAVFORMED) and WEU ships under the command of an Italian admiral are the operational forces charged with enforcing the embargo. They are authorized use of the minimum force necessary to ensure compliance.

#### Summary

The legality of naval interdiction of commerce in peacetime operations when authorized by international authority like the United Nations appears to be fully accepted. The basic justification is to exercise the right of individual or collective security when faced with a threat to international peace. In both the Adriatic Maritime Interdiction operation and the Middle East Maritime Interception Operation we now have "international economic action taken under the coercive powers granted to the United Nations Security Council... and in accordance with the right of collective security ...utilizing actions that in years past were reserved for belligerent nations engaged in declared wars".<sup>16</sup> Both these operations demonstrate the evolution of international law that brings the old concept of the pacific blockade under the authority of an international organization of collective security. As such they are coercive measures using limited naval force in operations short of war

designed to preserve the peace.



## CHAPTER III

### STUDIES IN NAVAL INTERDICTION OPERATIONS

The previous section established the growth in the importance of international approval and support for naval interdiction operations in peacetime.

This section of the paper will examine four operations in the post World War II era to determine the other factors and conditions which an operational commander must take into account when considering the use of naval interdiction of commerce in peacetime as a means of achieving national policy objectives.

In each of these operations the main points that will be addressed are:

- What was the policy objective ?
- How did the imposition a naval interdiction operation help achieve the objective ?
- Was the interdiction instrumental by itself or was it effective only in conjunction with other elements of coercive power ?
- What other situational conditions made the interdiction effective ?

#### 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis Quarantine

In October, 1962 the United States confirmed the presence of Soviet medium range missiles in Cuba. The sites were being built

by the Soviet Union despite strong warnings from the United States against installing offensive missiles in Cuba and repeated Soviet assurances that they would not.<sup>17</sup> The U.S. National Command Authority formulated six major courses of action for consideration which ranged from doing nothing through blockade, surgical air strikes and invasion of Cuba. All of these courses of action had pros and cons which were the subject of intense discussion. The comparative advantages of a blockade were;

1) It was a middle course between inaction and attack. 2) It took the initiative away from the Soviets, placing upon them the burden of choice for the next step. 3) A confrontation at sea in waters close to home was much to the U.S. Navy's advantage. 4) A blockade allowed the U.S. to demonstrate its conventional military strength with the implicit threat of subsequent non-nuclear steps.<sup>18</sup> Over the entire crisis hung the threat of escalation to nuclear war. A key factor in the decision to implement a "blockade" was that it bought time. It allowed for continued negotiation and reconsideration while applying strictly limited and controlled force in a demonstration of resolve. As President Kennedy stated:

"While defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to the choice of either a humiliating defeat or a nuclear war"<sup>19</sup>

A major disadvantages of the blockade option was the illegality of a "blockade" in international law and the connotations of an act of war that the term implied. Thus, as we have already discussed, the need to label the blockade a

"quarantine" and to garner international support for the U.S. action as an act of collective security. A second disadvantage was the inability of the quarantine to act directly on the problem. In other words the quarantine could do nothing about the existence of missiles already in Cuba.

On 22 October 1962 President Kennedy announced a "strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba". The quarantine was directed at only specific contraband items. Its method of enforcement was to stop, board, search and divert any vessel suspected of carrying contraband. The U.S. Navy established a quarantine line on an arc 500 NM from Cuba's Cape Maysi. On 24 October Soviet cargo ships stopped short of the line and then turned back. On 28 October Premier Khrushchev announced the decision to withdraw the missiles from Cuba.

Unquestionably the U.S. national policy objective, the removal of offensive Soviet missiles from Cuba, was achieved. The imposition of the quarantine was instrumental in this success but clearly would not have been effective in and of itself. The President's announcement emphasized that the quarantine was only an initial step. At the same time the U.S. began to mobilize troops for an invasion force and to move squadrons of tactical aircraft to southern airbases in preparation for air strikes on Cuba. What forced the Soviets to stop construction on missile sites already nearing operational readiness and to agree to withdraw them was the United States tactical and strategic (nuclear) strength and apparent willingness to force a showdown.

As Graham Allison points out: "The blockade constituted an effective and wise initial step. But only when coupled with the implicit threat of further action...did it succeed in forcing Soviet withdrawal of the missiles...The blockade alone could have prevented Soviet ships from bringing additional missiles to Cuba but would not have forced removal of the missiles already in place." 20 So in this instance the measure of effectiveness of the quarantine was the achievement of national objectives. The "purposeful" objective of the use of naval force, preventing the arrival of further offensive weapons, was met. The "expressive" objective, demonstrating U.S. resolve, was also met when the Soviets agreed to remove the missiles already in place.

Of the conditions which made this quarantine operation successful the most important was the fact of U.S. naval supremacy. The Soviets lacked the capability to challenge U.S. control of the sea particularly in waters so close to the U.S. mainland.

The geographic position of Cuba conveyed a number of advantages for the success of this operation. As an island Cuba is obviously vulnerable to naval interdiction. There were no other available land or air routes that the Soviets could use to circumvent the quarantine. The close proximity of Cuba allowed the U.S. fleet to sortie and arrive on station rapidly and it allowed them to be easily resupplied and relieved. A third geographic advantage was the ability of the Navy to concentrate its force in the five navigable channels ships must use when

approaching Cuba from the Atlantic.

Good intelligence and aerial surveillance was another important factor in the effectiveness of the operation. U.S. forces were able to locate and track the approaching Soviet cargo ships well out in the Atlantic. The reports and descriptions of these vessels allowed the NCA to make critical decisions regarding the positioning of U.S. naval forces and the selection of which ships to be stopped or which to let pass by unchallenged.

In summary the quarantine was successful in helping to achieve U.S. policy objectives because it was an appropriate strategy that made use of U.S. strengths and took advantage of Soviet weaknesses. It was feasible because of U.S. naval superiority and the advantages conferred by Cuba's geographic position. Finally, the quarantine was a suitable first step which, when used in conjunction with the threat of further military force and when legitimized by the international community, forced the Soviets to back down.

#### The Beira Patrol and Sanctions Against Rhodesia

The Beira Patrol was implemented by Great Britain in order to enforce economic sanctions against Rhodesia. The British governments response to Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) was to work with the United Nations to gain international cooperation and support while still retaining the initiative and responsibility for resolving the problems in its colonial territory.

Britain began unilateral imposition of sanctions immediately after UDI was declared on 11 November 1965. The UN followed several days later with a call for member nations to voluntarily break off economic relations. In December Britain increased the pressure with another batch of sanctions, including an embargo on sales of all oil and petroleum products. The naval patrol was established at this point to prevent the delivery of oil to Rhodesia via the port of Beira, Mozambique. When verbal 'persuasion' proved to be ineffective in turning back some ships the UN passed UNSCR 221 declaring the situation a threat to peace and authorizing Britain the use of force, if necessary, to interdict oil tankers bound for Beira. 21 Over the next several years more stringent economic and trade sanctions were voted by the UN Security Council in an effort to end the 'illegal regime' in Rhodesia. Despite the prediction of British Prime Minister Harold Wilson in January, 1966 that Rhodesia would capitulate in 'weeks rather than months' in response to economic sanctions, the sanctions were to last for another thirteen years. The Beira Patrol was maintained by the Royal Navy until 1975.

The British national policy objectives in the imposition of sanctions and the establishment of a naval interdiction operation were to 'restore Rhodesia to the rule of law, to allegiance to the Crown'. Once this was done then independence could be granted based on Five Principles which included progress toward majority rule, improvement in the political status of the African population and an end to racial discrimination. 22 More abstract

and indirect objectives were to maintain Britain's positive image and reputation in the world and particularly in the Commonwealth, to relieve pressure on Britain in the UN, and to uphold standards of democracy and human rights. 23

The causes of the eventual transfer of power in Rhodesia are beyond the scope of this paper. Elections held in April, 1980 brought a clear victory for the Popular Front party and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) selected Robert Mugabe as Prime Minister. This fulfilled the ultimate policy objective of Great Britain but it is fair to say that economic sanctions in general, and the Beira Patrol in particular, were only peripherally responsible for this outcome.

The Beira Patrol was successful in the 'purposeful' limited objective of stopping oil bound for Rhodesian via Beira. The overall trade and economic sanctions were not, however, successful in isolating Rhodesia or in bringing about the compliance that had been so optimistically predicted to require only weeks. Sanctions were applied gradually which allowed the Rhodesians to work out solutions and alternatives. Some nations, such as South Africa and Portugal continued to trade with Rhodesia, and many nations turned a blind eye to clandestine trade. 24 Thus, despite the effectiveness of the naval interdiction effort oil was still supplied to Rhodesia from South Africa.

By the measure of effectiveness of achieving the primary national policy objective the Beira Patrol would have to be

judged ineffective. It was, in fact, ended four years before the objective was attained. On another level however, as an "expressive" use of naval force the interdiction operation can be said to have been effective. In conjunction with the trade sanctions the patrol served as a concrete expression of disapproval. In a situation where doing nothing could be regarded as complicity but where direct military action was not feasible the interdiction operation provided an "expressive function" which was an important consideration for the British government. 26

The Beira Patrol is another example of an interdiction operation undertaken by a superior naval force. In fact, there was no military threat or challenge posed to the patrolling ships. The limited scope of the interdiction also contributed to its success in achieving its limited military objective. The patrol was only concerned with one contraband product, oil, and with stopping its delivery to only one port of entry. Additionally, the flow of shipping to Beira was not particularly heavy so the demands on the ships on station were easily met.

The geographic position of Rhodesia posed the greatest challenge to the success of the operation. Far from Britain or any developed logistics bases only a navy with well developed underway logistics support could have maintained its ships on station. Another consideration was the number of ships required to be committed to the operation in order to maintain a continuous presence. During the first two years of the operation



forty eight ships participated in the patrol. 27 The Royal Navy clearly had to devote considerable resources to this commitment. A smaller navy or one incapable of resupplying ships at sea would not have been able to maintain an operation of this type so far from bases of support.

Intelligence and air support for air surveillance also played a role in the effectiveness of the interdiction. The ships on patrol were provided with information regarding expected merchant ship arrivals. At the beginning of the patrol the aircraft carriers HMS ARK ROYAL and EAGLE were used to provide aerial surveillance. This air support was later provided by RAF patrol planes when basing rights in the Malagasy Republic (Madagascar) were obtained.

In summary, the Beira Patrol maintained by the Royal Navy for nine years was effective in its specific limited objective of stopping oil from reaching Rhodesia via Beira. While an inappropriate strategy for forcing a landlocked country to comply with international demands for change it was appropriate as an "expressive" use of naval force, demonstrating the disapproval of the British government. The feasibility of maintaining the patrol was aided by the lack of any military opposition or threat and by the obtaining of bases for patrol planes in the theater of operation. It was hindered by the distance from logistic support bases and from Britain. This was overcome by the ability of the Royal Navy to replenish at sea and by the commitment of substantial resources to the operation.

### Middle East Maritime Interception Force Operations

The Maritime Interception Force (MIF) was the primary instrument used to enforce United Nations Security Council resolutions imposing economic sanctions on Iraq. On 6 Aug 90 the UN passed UNSCR 661 calling for an international economic and trade embargo on Iraq in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. A multinational maritime force was developed to enforce these sanctions by intercepting prohibited cargo on shipping bound for or leaving Iraqi and Kuwaiti ports or the Jordanian port of Al-Aqabah. Although the U.S. Navy provided the bulk of the Coalition forces conducting the Maritime Interception Operation (MIO), a total of thirteen nations ultimately provided ships for the MIF. On 25 Aug 90, UNSCR 665 was passed which authorized the use of force to enforce the sanctions and the MIO began in earnest. Although economic sanctions are still in place and the MIO is ongoing as of this writing, this paper will only address the period between 6 Aug 90 and the commencement of hostilities on 17 Jan 91.

The national policy objectives of the United States in this crisis were; 1) immediate and complete withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait; 2) Restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government; 3) Security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf; 4) Safety and protection of the lives of American citizens abroad.<sup>28</sup>

Economic sanctions and their enforcement by the MIF operation were only one part of the U.S. strategy to achieve these objectives. The U.S. pursued diplomatic initiatives in an

attempt to resolve the conflict while at the same time building the military force in the region necessary to take action in the event diplomacy and economic pressure failed. Another key aspect of the U.S. strategy was to build an effective coalition and to integrate coalition forces into U.S. operational plans.

The embargo on Iraq's trade was essentially total, shutting off more than 90% of imports and nearly all exports. Because of the high degree of international cooperation and support the alternate land routes for trade and the oil pipelines were shut down in conjunction with the interdiction at sea. The Iraqi economy was particularly vulnerable to a total trade embargo because of its dependence on a single commodity, oil, for 95% of its export earnings. 29 The MIF operation itself was very effective, essentially eliminating any seaborne commerce for Iraq.

The contribution of economic sanctions and the MIF operation to the achievement of the national policy objectives must be judged at two levels. At the first level, sanctions did not force Iraq to comply with UN resolutions by withdrawing from Kuwait. Sanctions may have hurt the Iraqi economy and people but the political leader, Saddam Hussein, was not vulnerable to the pressures caused by the economic hardship. It should be pointed out that sanctions were never expected to be the sole instrument to achieve the national policy objectives. Even the most optimistic proponents of sanctions estimated "a year or two" for them to work. 30 This time frame was infeasible for the

United States faced with the challenge of maintaining a fragile Coalition of disparate nations and the requirement to sustain large numbers of troops in the Saudi desert.

At a second level the MIF operation in support of economic sanctions did contribute significantly to the US strategy which eventually did achieve national policy objectives. Interdiction of trade weakened the Iraqi economy and the ability of Iraq to sustain military operations. It provided pressure in support of diplomatic negotiation and provided an 'expressive' use of naval force demonstrating opposition to Iraqi aggression. Finally, it helped lay the foundation for coalition building and international cooperation.

Of the conditions and factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the MIF operation the most significant was the fact of nearly complete international support. This increased the effectiveness of the naval interdiction effort by cutting off alternate routes and sources of supply. Another factor was the overwhelming naval superiority of the Coalition forces. The numbers of Coalition ships available made it possible to search for and interdict merchant traffic throughout the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Oman.

The geographic position of Iraq with ports only at the northern end of the Persian Gulf made her vulnerable to naval interdiction once the alternate land routes had been cut off. Trade for Iraq through the Jordanian port of Al-Aqabah, at the head of the Red Sea was also easily cut off. The relatively

confined waters of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf with well defined shipping lanes through narrow choke points also aided the interdiction forces.

The distance of the theater of operation from the United States made for long lines of communication and supply. This was effectively countered by a long history of operation in the region, a well developed system of logistical support and the availability of ports in the region.

Unlike the Beira Patrol, the MIF operation had to contend with heavy merchant traffic through two of the most heavily travelled sea lanes in the world. Intelligence regarding movement of suspected merchant vessels or Iraqi flag vessels was an important aid to the interdiction effort. Availability of aircraft including land based patrol aircraft, carrier based aircraft and embarked helicopters was vital.

Because this was a coalition force a factor which could have impacted on the success of the operation was the lack of a formal command structure under the operational control of a single commander. Each naval force received MIF tasking from its own national command authority. Despite this potential problem, the cooperation and coordination of the multinational interception effort was generally good. A monthly MIF conference was held to divide areas of responsibility, to standardize procedures and to review any other matters of concern. Many of the interceptions and boarding were conducted cooperatively by ships of different navies. 31

In summary, the Middle East Maritime Interception Force Operation was an effective tool in the overall national military strategy. It was an appropriate use of limited naval force to enforce economic sanctions and to support diplomatic negotiations. The MIF operation was feasible because of the overwhelming U.S. and coalition naval superiority and by the availability of logistic support. Finally, the MIF operation was suitable because it took action which was authorized by the United Nations, helped to build Coalition cohesiveness and put pressure on Iraq while sufficient military strength was marshaled to achieve the national policy objectives by force.

#### Adriatic Maritime Interdiction Operations

United Nations economic sanctions and trade embargo against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) were approved in May, 1992. Between May and November ships of NATO and the WEU were deployed to the Adriatic Sea but were only able to monitor maritime traffic. They were not authorized to stop and search vessels suspected of breaking the UN embargo. Faced with blatant evidence of regular violations of the embargo the UN Security Council passed Resolution 787 which authorized member nations to enforce the embargo at sea by the use of force if necessary. In response the NATO and WEU established separate but cooperative interdiction operations with the mandate to stop, board and search vessels suspected of carrying contraband bound for or departing ports in the former Yugoslavia. Once detected, ships are identified and interrogated and a decision is made to

release, divert or board the vessel. Permitted cargos are medical supplies and foodstuffs. All other commodities and products including oil and military equipment are prohibited.

The UN policy objective in imposing sanctions is to force the government of the Federal Republic (Serbia and Montenegro) to end support for the violent civil war being fought in Bosnia-Herzegovina by Serbs against Muslim Bosnians. In addition to sanctions, the UN has attempted to resolve the conflict diplomatically. As of this writing all of these efforts are ongoing and their outcome cannot accurately be predicted.

To judge the contribution of the naval interdiction operation to the achievement of the UN objective this paper will have to indulge in some speculation. Clearly NATO and the WEU have the ships and resources to effectively interdict all seaborne commerce. What is also clear is that trade across the land borders of Serbia and through the international waterway of the Danube River has not been totally cut off. This dilutes the effect of the naval interdiction. The sanctions which the naval interdiction effort supports take time to work if they are going to work at all. My speculation is that by the time the sanctions can hurt Serbia to the point they are ready to comply with UN demands the world will be faced with a "fait accompli" by the Serbs in Bosnia.

A current assessment of the naval interdiction effort in the Adriatic is that it is effective in its limited military objective of stopping seaborne trade with the Federal Republic of

Yugoslavia. 32 The interdiction is also useful in the 'expressive' function of demonstrating concrete action and international disapproval. This expressive functions is significantly weakened, however, by the seeming peripheral nature of the naval operations in preventing the ongoing suffering in Bosnia-Herzgovina.

The actual physical conditions that have contributed to an effective interdiction operation are similar to the cases studied. NATO and the WEU bring sufficient ships to the operation to adequately patrol the restricted waters of the Adriatic. In this effort they are supported by land based patrol aircraft and by their own embarked helicopters. US carrier aircraft have also been used in support when available. The interdiction patrol ships face no substantial air or surface threat and so are able to operate with impunity. The geography of the area is conducive to the operation with a limited number of ports to monitor and with restricted sea lanes. The patrol ships are also operating close to support bases in Italy. This allows easy supply and relief.

In summary, the Adriatic maritime interdiction operation is effective in its specific limited military objective of stopping seaborne trade. It does not seem to be an appropriate strategy for forcing compliance with the UN objectives. It is useful only in support of other elements of coercion. These other elements are currently missing in the actions of the UN. Its suitability as an expressive use of limited naval force is limited because of



its lack of immediate impact on the events in Bosnia and the lack of real commitment required in this type of naval operation. It is a feasible operation because of the availability of superior naval forces and suitable geographic conditions for effective naval interdiction.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER

From Chapter III's examination of four naval interdiction operations in the post WWII era we can derive the elements of concern to an operational commander which were common to each operation. The following are the considerations a U.S. operational commander must take into account before implementing a naval interdiction effort as part of a strategy to achieve national policy objectives:

- 1) The first major consideration is the understanding that a naval interdiction operation is most effective when used in conjunction with other elements of national power and backed by the credible threat of military force. Economic sanctions, enforced by naval interdiction, take time to work. They may not work at all, dependent on the vulnerability of the target nation and the degree of international cooperation and support. They are imposed as a measure short of war, in the hope that the hardship inflicted will force compliance. If the target country is able to circumvent the sanctions (i.e. Rhodesia and Serbia), is strongly committed to its cause (i.e. Rhodesia), or its leadership is not responsive to political pressure from its distressed populace (i.e. Saddam Hussein in Iraq) then the sanctions and the naval interdiction will be futile or so long term that other measures must be considered.

2) A second consideration is the understanding that even though the naval interdiction operation may not be able to achieve the policy objective by itself it may still be a useful tool of coercive diplomacy. By its nature, the limited application of naval force such as an interdiction operation must support diplomatic negotiations. It applies pressure on the target nation and it fills an "expressive" function demonstrating disapproval and concrete action. It may also help to build international cooperation, as in the Middle East MIF operation. This effect can be dissipated over time if no progress is made in settling the dispute (i.e. the Beira Patrol). It may also be inapplicable if the interdiction operation demonstrates only a marginal commitment or is only a peripheral action with little effect on the crisis (i.e. the Adriatic interdiction operation).

3) A third consideration is the ability of the interdicting naval force to maintain sea control in the area of operation. Superior sea power and minimal threat were common to all four operations examined. The target nation was unable to mount any significant opposition to the interdiction effort. This was critical not only for the success of the operation but also for controlling escalation of the conflict. The goal in using limited naval force is to force compliance without resorting to open hostilities. If the target nation has the capability and will to fight back then either the conflict escalates or the interdiction force withdraws.

4) A fourth consideration is the composition of the

interdicting naval force. Will it be solely a U.S. force or will it be a multinational force? Command and control, rules of engagement and standardized procedures are all important aspects contributing to the success of the operation. The Middle East MIF operation was able to resolve these issues on an 'ad hoc' basis. In the Adriatic interdiction operation the NATO forces have standard operating procedures and a standing command structure. They have been able to coordinate with the WEU forces in the common effort.

5) A fifth consideration is the ability to sustain the interdiction forces at sea. The factors that affect this ability are the distance of the theater of operation from the home base, the availability of ships for the patrol and the availability of in theater support bases. The quarantine of Cuba and the Adriatic interception operation both had the advantage of proximity to the home base thus easing resupply and repair and reducing transit time to and from station. The Beira Patrol and the MIF operation were only possible because of a well developed logistics support system and an underway replenishment capability.

6) The geography of the target nation and of the sea approaches to its coastline are significant factors in the effectiveness of the interdiction. An island nation, such as Cuba or nations with few ports of entry like Iraq, Rhodesia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are vulnerable to interdiction of their commerce. The sea approaches to Cuba, Iraq and

Yugoslavia pass through choke points and restricted waters. This also aids the interdiction effort. A country with significant land borders are less susceptible to naval interdiction enforcing sanctions. This points to the importance of international cooperation in cutting off this clandestine trade.

7) The availability of air assets either land based, based on an aircraft carrier or embarked on the patrolling ships increases the capability of the force to search and enforce the interdiction. Air assets played significant roles in all of the operations examined.

The above listed concerns are all critical for the operational commander to consider before implementation of a naval interdiction operation. In today's international environment at least as important a consideration is the support and legitimization of the operation by the international authority of the United Nations. As we have discussed in Chapter II the legality of naval interdiction operations in peacetime as a means of responding to a threat to international peace and security has been fully accepted by the world community. This action must be taken under the aegis of the UN as authorized under Article 41 and 42 of the UN charter. Without the support of the international community unilateral economic sanctions and trade embargoes imposed by the United States would only be marginally effective. A naval interdiction effort undertaken to enforce the embargo would be illegal. Only a declaration of war, thereby invoking the belligerent right to blockade would allow

U.S. warships to stop, board and search foreign flag vessels on the high seas.

Two past international crisis illustrate the importance of the United Nations as a legitimizing authority. In 1937, President Roosevelt, in response to Japanese aggression in Manchuria proposed in a nebulous speech a 'quarantine' of Japan to protect the 'health of the community'. 33 In more concrete discussions with Great Britain planning was conducted regarding a collective long range naval blockade as a means of restraining Japan. The British, then pursuing a policy of appeasement, were less than enthusiastic about the concept and Roosevelt eventually dropped the idea. At the time of this proposal, the League of Nations was a weak and ineffective international organization with no ability to promote collective security. The United States did not even belong to the League. A quarantine, with its precedent rooted in the 'pacific blockade' of the 19th century would have had tenuous legal ground. Without the legitimacy granted by an international organization the Japanese could very well have interpreted the action as a blockade and an act of war. In 1937 the U.S. Navy was at 65% of its treaty strength and ill prepared to enforce a blockade in the face of Japanese Navy resistance.34

In more recent history, the 1979 Iranian Hostage Crisis poses another situation where naval interdiction was contemplated but not implemented due to lack of international support. Soviet intransigence in the UN Security Council resulted in the vetoing

of mandatory sanctions against Iran and the United States was unable to get the support of its allies to impose far reaching sanctions in the absence of a UN resolution. 35 The U.S. did impose unilateral economic sanctions but not implement a naval interdiction operation to enforce the sanctions. Clearly the U.S. had the naval strength to take unilateral action. The fact that this option was not selected was due to a number of factors but high among them was the lack of international support and the legitimacy conferred by UN resolution.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The use of naval interdiction in peacetime as an element of coercive diplomacy is likely to be a viable strategy option for the United States for the foreseeable future. It has advantages as a 'purposeful' use of naval force to enforce trade and economic sanctions. It also has utility in the 'expressive' use of force as a concrete demonstration of national resolve, determination, or disapproval. It is one level of naval force in what has been termed 'gunboat diplomacy'. Force that is meant to be used in operations short of war to deter aggression, force compliance or preserve the peace.

The operational commander must consider different factors and conditions before implementing a naval interdiction operation as part of his strategy to achieve national objectives; Will the interdiction be used in conjunction with other elements of national power? Are there ongoing diplomatic negotiations? Is there a credible threat of military force if sanctions and their enforcement by naval interdiction fail? What is the vulnerability of the target state and what are the time constraints for the sanctions to work? Will the naval forces assigned have superiority at sea and is there a target nation capability to resist that might cause unwanted escalation of the conflict? Will the interdiction force be U.S. ships only or



will it be a multinational effort ? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the geographic position of the target nation ? What is the capability to sustain the forces on station ? What is the availability of air assets to assist in the interdiction effort ?

Finally, the operational commander must consider whether the naval interdiction of commerce has the legitimacy of international support and authorization by the United Nations as a means of maintaining international peace and security. If the operation does not have this authorization then it should not be implemented.

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